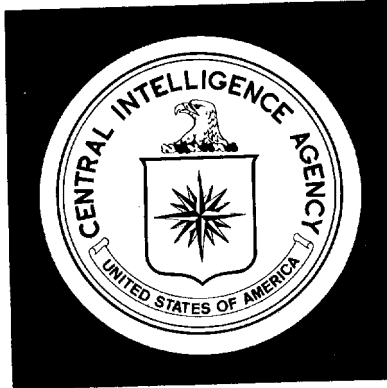


Top Secret



*North Vietnamese Capabilities and Intentions
Through the Rainy Season and Beyond*

NSA review completed

Top Secret

11

25X1

12 May 1973

Page Denied

12 May 1973

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

NORTH VIETNAMESE CAPABILITIES AND INTENTIONS
THROUGH THE RAINY SEASON AND BEYOND

1. This memorandum assesses in detail North Vietnamese military capabilities and intentions through the rainy season now beginning (i.e. from now to mid-October 1973), and examines more briefly Hanoi's intentions beyond that date. The memorandum takes a current look at the military strength of both the Communists and the GVN, and assesses the impact of Indochina's monsoonal climate on the capabilities of both sides over the next five months. There is general agreement within the Central Intelligence Agency with all of the judgments presented below on these subjects. On the more complicated question of Hanoi's intentions, there are differences of opinion among the various components of the Agency which work on the Vietnam problem. This memorandum presents the two main schools of thought which exist within the CIA, and makes no effort to submerge the differences in homogenized mush.

I. THE MILITARY BALANCE IN INDOCHINA*

A. South Vietnam

2. Overall Balance. During the 1972-73 dry season, both the Communists and the South Vietnamese have moved to rebuild and strengthen their military positions in South Vietnam. In terms of military

* See Annex A for a more detailed discussion of this subject.

manpower the advantage rests--as it always has--with the GVN; its ground combat forces total some 287,000 men while the Communists have only about 163,000 men despite the infusion of some 85,000 combat personnel since 1 September 1972. (For the time being, at least, the infiltration flow of combat troops appears to have stopped.) In the administrative services the GVN has a total of 224,000 men, while the Communists have about 72,000. (In MR-1, the manpower balance is only slightly in favor of the GVN.)

3. The balance in firepower between the two sides is more uncertain. In some categories, the Communists probably have the edge; their 122-mm and 130-mm field guns, which are present in South Vietnam in substantial numbers, have an effective range, accuracy, and rate of fire unmatched by anything in the GVN's arsenal. Moreover, since October 1972, Hanoi has dispatched some 600 tanks to the South Vietnamese theater. On the other hand, the GVN's firepower is also substantial--more than 1,000 tanks, 120 175-mm guns, and over 2,000 155-mm artillery howitzers plus 425 attack aircraft.*

4. Hanoi's 1972-73 dry season logistics campaign is now in its final stages. Large quantities of supplies--including virtually every type of ordnance and military equipment--have been dispatched to South Vietnam. The flow of supplies will fall off as the rainy season begins in the next few weeks, but the Communists are already in a strong logistical position to support major military action over the next six months. Moreover, North Vietnam could move additional supplies into northern South Vietnam rapidly if they were needed.

* The North Vietnamese, of course, have the capability to mount limited air operations over South Vietnam; their aircraft inventory includes about 200 MIGs and eight IL-28 light bombers. In weighing such a course, however, Hanoi would have to consider the South Vietnamese air force, and--far more important--the risk of US retaliation.

5. One important factor favoring the Communists, of course, is that the GVN is forced to disperse its troops country-wide and that its forces are now in a maximum defensive posture. There is no strategic reserve available for speedy deployment to high threat areas, as there was at the beginning of the Communist offensive in 1972.

6. Regional Balance. From the standpoint of manpower and logistics, the Communists are strongest in MR 1 and MR 3; indeed in the northern two provinces of MR 1 the balance probably favors the Communists. Hanoi's forces in both MR 1 and MR 3 have the capability of severely testing ARVN, threatening major population centers, and possibly capturing some provincial capitals. In coastal MR 1 the rainy season will not begin until next fall, while in MR 3, especially the northern part, short supply lines will mitigate the effect of the rainy weather. North Vietnamese capabilities in the lowlands of MR 2 and probably throughout MR 4 are limited to road interdiction, attacking isolated outposts, and tying down ARVN forces. In the highlands of MR 2, the Communists could launch multi-regimental attacks, though they probably could not capture and hold any provincial capitals. Heavy seasonal rains in this area, however, will hamper Communist armor and artillery mobility.

B. Laos

7. The Communist forces in Laos have a clear advantage over government forces both in terms of effective manpower and firepower. Although the friendly regular combat forces total some 68,000 men [redacted] as opposed to a combined NVA and Pathet Lao force of 58,000 men, the government's numerical advantage is clearly offset by greater Communist strengths in leadership, discipline and morale. The Communists also enjoy superior firepower on the ground. The backbone of the Royal Lao government's large caliber artillery is a total of some 85 105-mm and 155-mm howitzers, which are no match for the Communists' 122-mm and 130-mm field guns. To what extent the Royal Lao Air Force (RLAF) can compensate for the government's weakness on the ground is not clear; in the past, the Communists' advantage on the

25X1
25X1

ground has been somewhat offset by US air power. It is unlikely that friendly forces would fight very well without the American aerial umbrella.

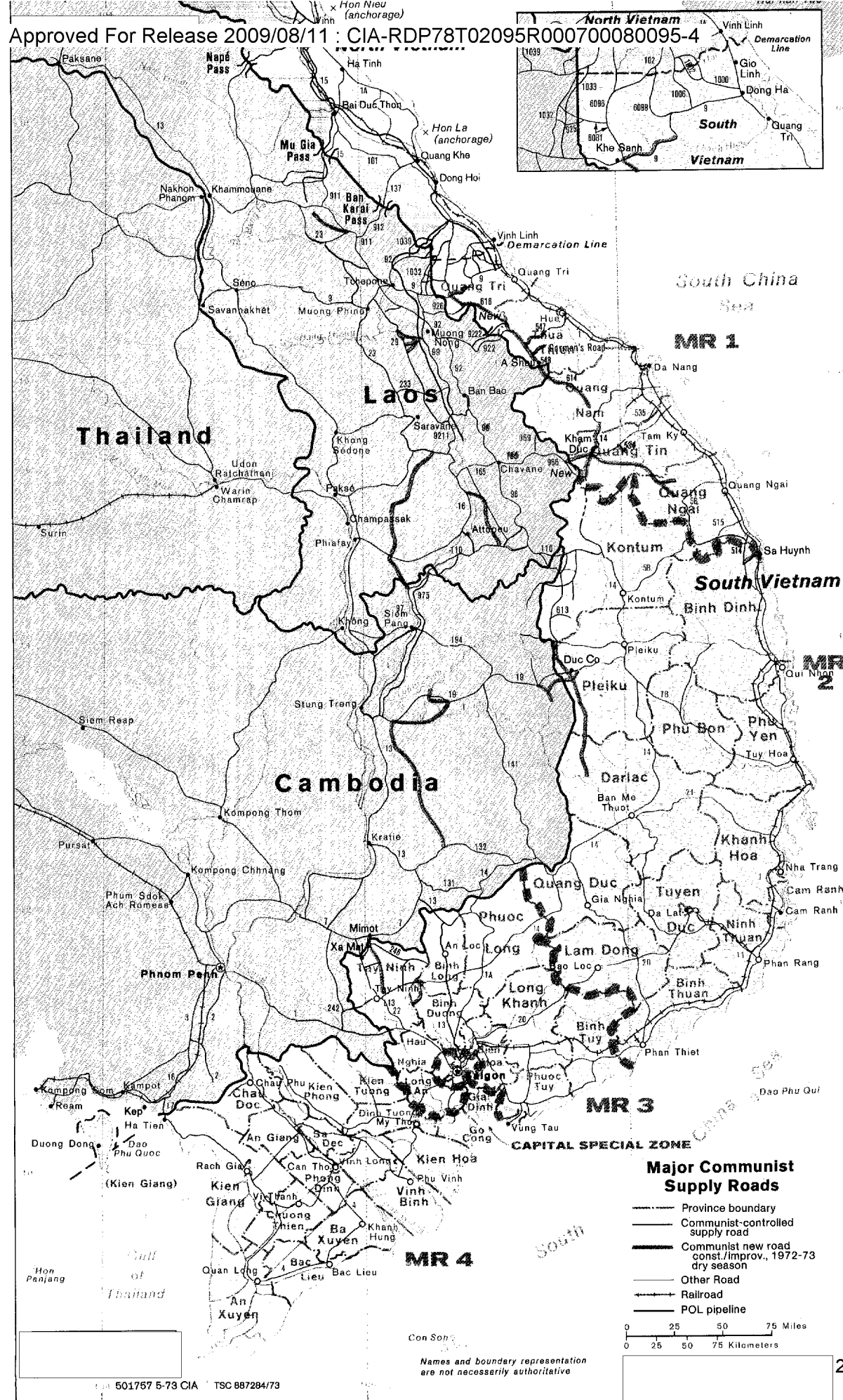
C. Cambodia

8. The overall military balance in Cambodia is also in the communists' favor. As in Laos, the numerical superiority of the government's forces is largely negated by their poor tactics, weak leadership, and deteriorating morale. Despite a three-to-one superiority in combat forces, the FANK shows little inclination to fight. Government forces have remained defensively clustered around lines of communication and major towns, allowing the Khmer Communists (KC) to roam most of the countryside virtually unchallenged. Moreover, the KC have become increasingly adept at concentrating multi-battalion and multi-regimental forces for attacks against FANK. Over the next few months, the KC will be able to maintain the interdiction of land routes to South Vietnam as well as harassment of Mekong traffic. Other land routes could also come under heavy pressure, and the government could lose one or more provincial capitals still in its hands.

II. COMMUNIST CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY IN INDOCHINA*

9. During the current dry season, the North Vietnamese have substantially increased and strengthened their logistic links leading to and within South Vietnam. Several hundred miles of new roads have been constructed and other key routes have been improved. (See map on following page.) Base areas have been upgraded, and many new large permanent storage/support facilities have also been added throughout the system. In addition, two new petroleum pipelines (one already

* See Annex B for a fuller treatment of this subject.



existed) have been extended into South Vietnam's MR 1, and the Communists are apparently constructing or refurbishing a series of airstrips in South Vietnam and southern Laos.

10. Although the Ho Chi Minh Trail network has been improved, the bulk of the new Communist construction has been aimed at improving North Vietnamese access into and between Communist-controlled areas in South Vietnam. Indeed, a strong case can be made that the Communists intend to open an in-country motorable route extending from the DMZ southward along the western border of South Vietnam into MR 3, possibly as far as COSVN Headquarters in Tay Ninh Province.

11. This road construction will provide the Communists a major logistical network within South Vietnam, linking the major Communist base areas with one another. In effect, this effort constitutes an eastward extension of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. When complete with lateral extensions leading eastward into the South Vietnam lowlands, the network will permit flexibility in the deployment of Communist forces. In particular, it would be possible to move armor and artillery relatively quickly from one sector to another. The creation of a major supply route within South Vietnam would also allow the Communists to scale down their use of, and forces in, southern Laos and, by so doing, appear to meet US demands concerning Communist use of the area. In any case, the Communist construction activity in South Vietnam substantially augments Hanoi's logistical capabilities and makes it easier to maintain the option of resuming major military hostilities at some future date.

III. THE WEATHER FACTOR*

12. Weather has always been a factor in North Vietnamese military planning. The upcoming Southwest Monsoon (June-September) will bring generally

* See Annex C for additional detail.

wet weather to Laos, Cambodia, and most of South Vietnam. The coastal areas of MR 1 and MR 2 will enjoy clear and dry weather, and the Communists could use heavy equipment in these areas throughout the summer. Elsewhere in South Vietnam, however, as well as in Laos and Cambodia, Communist tactical and supply operations will be hampered by heavy rains, particularly in the use of heavy equipment. The rains would probably limit the duration of major Communist military action in central and southern South Vietnam, but would have negligible effects in eastern MR 1 and MR 2.

13. The ARVN also suffers from diminished mobility during the monsoon, although its road network is better suited to wet weather use than that of the NVA. Poor weather does, of course, reduce the effectiveness of VNAF air support.

IV. NORTH VIETNAMESE INTENTIONS

14. In light of the Communist activities and capabilities discussed above, prudence requires continuing attention to the possibility of large-scale military initiatives by Communist forces, particularly in the MR 1 area. There is no argument on the matter of capabilities, but on the question of intentions, there are two schools of thought, whose reasoning and conclusions are set forth separately below.

Case A. The "Deferred Major Military Action" Argument

15. One school believes that despite manifest capabilities for doing so, the Communists are not likely to initiate a significantly increased level of military action in the foreseeable future. This school's argument runs as follows.

16. There is presently a lack of the indicators that usually show up a few weeks before large-scale Communist offensives--forward deployments, stepped up communications, intense reconnaissance, etc. In MR 1, the Communists have reduced the number of combat

units by withdrawing a full division and parts of two others. Elsewhere in the country, the rainy season will soon begin to impede large-scale troop and equipment movements as well as the logistic flows vital to combat support. Based on this evidence alone, the chances of a large-scale, country-wide Communist offensive before the end of the rainy season in the late fall now appear slight. This judgment is reinforced by analysis of Hanoi's current strategy in the following paragraphs. Indeed, this analysis suggests that large-scale military initiatives will be postponed for as much as two or three years.

17. This does not mean, of course, that Hanoi has abandoned its objective of taking over the south; nor has it necessarily lost faith in large-scale military action as the key weapon in the struggle. It does mean, however, that Hanoi has been forced to accept another delay in the quarter century struggle to impose the rule of the Vietnamese Communist Party on all of Vietnam.

18. To put recent Communist activities in perspective and to assess their intentions, it is necessary to consider the factors which underlay Hanoi's decision last summer and fall to negotiate seriously, to reach a tentative agreement in October, and to pay the additional price required for the January Paris Agreements. Put briefly, Hanoi finally concluded that given the terms available, an agreement and the cessation of large-scale hostilities were less disadvantageous in terms of its future prospects than no agreement and continued fighting. The following considerations were relevant:

a.) The failure of the spring offensive to crack RVNAF and to generate any popular movement to the Communist side in South Vietnam.

b.) The failure of the spring offensive to wring concessions from the US Government despite the impending elections and Hanoi's recognition by the fall that President Nixon's political position at home was unique; i.e., he would be able to sustain

military action against North Vietnam for an extended period if there were no changes in Hanoi's negotiating position.

c.) Hanoi's doubts as to the availability of continuing military aid from the USSR and China in quantities necessary to support future offensives.

d.) The cumulative stresses and strains of the war on the people and the party in North Vietnam which were accentuated in 1972 by the heavy losses of the spring offensive, closure of the ports, and sustained and heavy bombing.

e.) The prospect, overall, that efforts to sustain the main force struggle would result in a net and perhaps irreversible decline in the Communist military and political position in the South.

19. While the Communists felt compelled to negotiate the Paris Agreements, they remained determined to retain a viable military and political structure within South Vietnam. This required a strategy that took account of certain realities such as:

a.) The degraded condition of Communist forces in the South due to extended combat.

b.) The demonstrated weakness of PRG and VC political forces.

c.) The enhanced strength and confidence of the RVNAF and the GVN administration.

d.) The danger that under the terms and conditions of an agreement, the strength and morale of Communist military forces and the party apparatus in South Vietnam would decline.

20. The strategy designed to protect and advance Communist interests can be discerned from the pattern of Communist activities since January 1973 and the available documentary evidence. The core of this strategy involves the creation in South Vietnam of a type of Communist presence not envisaged by the

Allied side under the Paris Agreements. In essence, the Communists are bent on establishing an enclave extending southward from the DMZ into MR 3 and with close administrative links across the DMZ into the DRV. At present, the primary effort remains that of consolidating and strengthening the enclave. At the outset, this effort required extensive and gross violations of the Paris Agreements as Hanoi sought to bring military units back to normal strength and to build large stocks of military and other supplies. But Hanoi probably calculates that once the current supply push is complete, future violations of this nature can be held below the level likely, in their view, to provoke major US military reaction.

21. The effort at consolidation also requires some military actions which violate the ceasefire. GVN pockets and salients within Communist-controlled territory must be eliminated, base areas in the Delta need to be enlarged, logistic routes have to be secured, and efforts by the ARVN to extend its area of control must be repulsed. These tasks require that Communist armed forces be maintained at full strength and not permitted to weaken through attrition.

22. To support these forces and the administrative apparatus which will be strengthened by cadre sent down from the north, the Communists will continue with a vigorous road building effort; in time, the road net under Communist control within South Vietnam will extend all the way from the DMZ to Tay Ninh Province, reducing or eliminating the need to make significant use of routes in the Lao panhandle. Access to Communist units in the Delta may require continued use of Cambodian soil, and territory in both Laos and Cambodia may still be exploited as rear support areas, but so long as large-scale hostilities are not planned or anticipated such use will become far less essential than in the past.

23. As time goes on, this Communist enclave in South Vietnam will take on the appearance of a southern extension of the DRV, complete with a civil administrative structure and a partially self-sufficient economy based on the production of some food and the

development of small scale production enterprises. If challenged on these developments, Hanoi might argue that nothing in the Paris Agreements specifies how or by whom Communist-controlled territory should be administered and that Article 15 does specify that the DMZ is not a political or territorial boundary.

24. Concurrent with the consolidation and internal development of this enclave, it will be used as a secure base from which political, terrorist and propaganda operations will be launched against the GVN, the ARVN, and the South Vietnamese population. It is doubtful that Hanoi expects to make any rapid progress through these various techniques in undermining the GVN. Specifically, there is no sign that the Communists suddenly became disillusioned with their political prospects after 28 January and decided to reverse course in favor of large-scale hostilities. On the contrary, the factors which impelled them to sign an agreement are still operative and one of those factors was recognition of their lack of political strength and appeal in the South.

25. Still, it has been argued that the lack of Communist political appeal in the South gives the GVN the edge in any situation in which Hanoi "defers" large-scale military action for an extended period of time. It is said that such a "deferral" spells acceptance of "defeat" by Hanoi because the Communist apparatus and military force would tend to lose its strength and commitment while confined to the sparsely populated backwoods and highlands. The argument here is that Hanoi in recognition of this dilemma has devised a strategy which it believes will avoid the trap. In other words, it believes it can experiment for some time with political, psychological, and terrorist techniques without suffering a loss in its basic strengths and that it can defer the question of a resort to large-scale action for some considerable period.

26. In the meantime this presence will appear increasingly to the South Vietnamese as solid, permanent, and above all, threatening. It will grow in visibility and its identity as an extension of

the northern administration will gradually emerge for all to see. Meanwhile, if things evolve as Hanoi expects, the US presence will fade, and the South Vietnamese will feel increasingly insecure. In due course, as this process goes on, Hanoi would plan to intensify the pressures on the South Vietnamese by stepped-up terrorist, political and diplomatic actions, and by incremental military pressures. And, of course, Hanoi will review periodically the option of a resumption of full-scale hostilities.

27. As noted at the beginning of this section, Hanoi's present strategy reflects a number of constraints which militate against the early resumption of such hostilities. Of these, the risk of renewed US military intervention and uncertainty as to the availability of military supplies from the USSR and China are probably the most important. Obviously, any change in Hanoi's assessment of these factors could result in another change in strategy. On present evidence, it would seem that the interests of Peking and Moscow in discouraging a renewal of general hostilities in Indochina will, if anything, increase over the next year or two. Hanoi's view of the risks of US intervention are more difficult to forecast, particularly since such a forecast involves assumptions about the US posture a year or two hence. For the moment, however, Hanoi appears convinced that the risks are high.

28. In general, it would appear to be in Hanoi's interests, within the limits imposed by its determination to maintain a secure and viable base in South Vietnam, to appear cooperative in working out the Paris Agreements. In particular it will be concerned that as its intent to maintain military forces at a high strength level in South Vietnam is confirmed, President Thieu will pressure the US to countenance or support efforts by the ARVN to invest and destroy Communist base areas. Such action by the ARVN might, from Hanoi's point of view, require a premature return to large-scale conflict. By adopting a "reasonable" posture once the current

supply push is completed, Hanoi might expect to discourage a decision by Thieu to take forceful action. Hanoi could afford to take some or all of the following actions:

a.) Reaffirm its support for the ICCS and permit its teams to operate selectively at designated entry points while continuing to frustrate coverage of many other entry points along the DMZ and opposite Laos.

b.) Permit an agreement on Laos to be consummated and provide a show of removing its forces from north Laos as well as the Laos Panhandle once the internal routes in South Vietnam are developed.

c.) Make a similar show of withdrawing its forces from Cambodia, and relax its terms for a Cambodian settlement to some extent, permitting a solution which did not involve a clear-cut ascendancy for its Khmer Communist allies. Of course, a Communist or pro-Communist regime in Phnom Penh would be more to Hanoi's advantage than some type of coalition on the Laos model. But this is really not a critical or vital matter in the near term and in terms of the requirements of the Communist position in South Vietnam. For no matter what kind of government exists in Phnom Penh, it will pose little risk to Communist use of essential base areas and logistic routes in that country. And Hanoi does not need access to Cambodian ports to maintain its forces in southern South Vietnam as has been demonstrated for several years. Moreover, Cambodian nature being what it is, the Communists will always be able to purchase and secure delivery of large quantities of food, medicines, and other necessities from or through Cambodian agents.

d.) In direct relations with the US as well as in the face it presents to the rest of the world, Hanoi can emphasize its interest in the reconstruction of the north and seek assistance, on relatively severe terms, for that endeavor. This interest is, indeed, genuine; some individuals in Hanoi may wish to give it priority for many years and others might

in time be converted by involvement in the effort and by the passage of time. For the present, however, there is little basis for concluding that the Communists are playing the game in South Vietnam for any purpose other than to win.

Case B. The "Higher Military Posture" Argument

29. The other school takes the same set of agreed facts (particularly the evidence on current Communist capabilities) as its point of departure, but interprets them somewhat differently and reaches somewhat different conclusions. The Case A and Case B analyses are not entirely antithetical. There is much overlap and common ground between them. Case B's proponents, however, rate considerably higher than Case A's the chances of the Communists' initiating major offensive military activity over the next few months, i.e. before October, and certainly before the end of this calendar year. Case B's proponents do not believe Hanoi intends to rely for any prolonged period primarily on political, psychological and terrorist techniques (or that the Communists can afford to do so). Nor do Case B's proponents believe Hanoi can, or will, long defer the question of a resort to large scale military action. The Case B analysis and argument runs as outlined below.

30. A major determinant of Vietnamese Communist strategy, and shifts therein, is the Hanoi Politburo's position--and shifts therein--on the issue of basic Party goals and their relative priority ranking. For almost two decades, the Party has officially had three basic goals: (1) protecting and developing the north, (2) liberating the south and (3) reunification. Since (3)'s achievement is contingent on achievement of (2), the two operative current goals are liberating the south and protecting/developing the north.

31. In theory, these two goals are co-equal and to be simultaneously pursued. Severe problems arise for the Politburo, however, in situations in which these goals cannot be assigned equal weight, i.e. situations in which pursuit of one inevitably prejudices pursuit of the other. In such situations,

these goals have to be given some form or degree of interim priority ranking. Agreeing on any such relative ranking has been a particularly difficult and awkward problem for the Politburo since Ho Chi Minh's death in September 1969.

32. So long as he was alive, Ho served the party as an umpire whose rulings all other Politburo members, and other senior party and military leaders, would unhesitatingly accept, without further argument or challenge. Thus Ho's prestige and presence insured that debates over or decisions on policies, strategy and basic priorities would always stay within bounds and could not become divisive to a degree that threatened basic party unity, cohesion or discipline.

33. Ho has been dead for over three and a half years. His Party Chairman's chair is still empty and no one now on the Politburo has the unchallengable authority or prestige necessary to fill Ho's umpire role. In this post-Ho interregnum, the Politburo has a presiding officer (First Secretary Le Duan), but in many respects it is a chairmanless committee--a type of body ill-suited to handling or coping with intense debate on fundamental issues. Furthermore, all members of the Politburo must be aware of the divisive, corrosive potential, in this context, of a head to head debate on basic goals and their relative priority ranking, particularly since policy positions in any such debate inevitably get associated with individuals and such debates hence risk opening the Pandora's box of individual rivalries and contests for primacy.

34. Several aspects of the situation prevailing in the summer of 1972--the checking and containment of the offensive the Communists launched on 30 March, the GVN's reasonable solidity under pressure, the vigorous U.S. response (mining and LINEBACKER I), President Nixon's commanding and improving domestic political position, the posture of Moscow and Peking--impelled the Politburo to face up to (among other things) the fact that continued pursuit of the southern liberation goal and struggle in its then current

form would inevitably entail severe, continuing and probably increasing punishment to the north. Hanoi's negotiating nibbles of September and negotiating behavior in October strongly suggest a Politburo decision that, at least for the time being, the goal of protecting the north had to be pursued even at the cost of some prejudice to southern prospects.

35. Chairmanless committees are not very adept at making--or sticking to--hard choices, particularly ones of an "either/or" variety. Committees are always inclined to seek the middle ground of ambiguous (something for everyone) compromises, frequently ones containing contrary elements. Some elements of Hanoi's behavior in November and early December suggest that the course of the negotiations led the Politburo to think it might be able to protect essential northern equities without materially jeopardizing southern prospects by attempting to exploit the negotiations themselves as a vehicle for driving a wedge between the US and the GVN. In any event, Hanoi's intransigent posture in November and early December certainly seems to have been motivated by this desire (among others).

36. December's events and US actions, notably LINEBACKER II, apparently induced the Politburo to shift ground once again. Whatever may have been the rationale or motivation, the Politburo acquiesced in--and, on 27 January, its representative signed--a set of agreements which, if strictly applied in their entirety, certainly protected the north and held the prospect of major improvement there, but would have had a devastating impact on the capabilities, morale and prospects of the Communists' southern organization. In fact, really living up to all of these agreements' major provisions would have entailed, for Hanoi, an indefinite postponement of the party's goal of liberating (i.e., conquering) the south. The Hanoi Politburo must have realized this, and the southern organization's leadership certainly did.

37. Though it clearly felt a need to protect the north, the Politburo was not willing to undercut the

southern struggle's prospects any more than was absolutely necessary. What Hanoi therefore needed to do--and immediately set about doing--was to initiate actions which (if successful) would collectively achieve the following results: reassure the southern organization that it had not been abandoned, improve its military capabilities (much depleted by the battles of 1972), advance the "PRG's" interests and political strengths (including its control of populated areas and strategic terrain), undercut the GVN's position and resources, minimize the adverse potentialities of the Paris Agreements by hampering the implementation of their inhibiting provisions (e.g. ICCS inspection), ascertain--by probe and test--the real limits of US tolerance, and establish, via this device, a minimally restrictive plateau of "accepted" Communist behavior. Overall, Hanoi wanted to create a climate and situation in which the Agreements' net practical effect--despite their actual language--was to establish a trade-off exchange of US prisoners for US military disengagement and to impose constraints on the GVN's actions while placing a minimum of effective constraints on Communist behavior.

38. In the period since 27 January, two things must have become increasingly evident to the Politburo in Hanoi and the leadership of the Communists' southern organization on the ground. First, the Communists' land grab attempts in late January/early February and the pattern of subsequent military action has shown that the GVN can cope fairly handily with Communist military pressures of the nature and scale essayed to date. Second, in the political sphere, the GVN's position is so strong and well consolidated that Communist prospects of early success in this arena are negligible under present circumstances.

39. It is within this overall context that the past few months' build-up of Communist military capabilities in South Vietnam ought to be assessed. The Communists are certainly developing and consolidating a connected series of enclaves running from the DMZ to MR 4. They are also developing on a crash basis a road and logistics network within South Vietnam

that, when completed, will make these connected enclaves one vast base and staging area, or redoubt. Their force and capabilities build-up--in logistic supplies, manpower and, especially, fire-power--undoubtedly has its prudential and defensive aspects. But there are several factors that need to be considered before dismissing the thesis that Hanoi has in mind something more militarily ambitious than defense and concluding that Hanoi's current military intentions are limited to probes and "nibbling" within what has become the normal range since 27 January:

a.) Though both Moscow and Peking (each for its own reasons) may not want Hanoi to initiate a fresh round of larger scale combat in South Vietnam, the current state of relations between these two major Communist powers is hardly conducive to reciprocal private dialogue and even less to concerted action. Neither Hanoi's overall behavior nor the limited amount of available direct evidence on current Soviet and Chinese aid pattern provides much support for the argument that the Soviets and Chinese will prevent the North Vietnamese from embarking on further military adventures.

b.) Hanoi is unquestionably interested in as much foreign aid as possible, but the way Hanoi has treated prospective Free World donors--including the US--indicates that Hanoi wants this aid only on its own terms. It also indicates that Free World aid--again, including that of the US--does not rank near the top of the Politburo's priority scale. Under the present situation, North Vietnam is not under attack, hence minimal northern equities are already amply protected. There is no indication that the Politburo has put the goal of developing the north so much ahead of liberating the south that it would be willing to curtail the actions it considered necessary in the south to get increased economic aid for the north. Furthermore, Hanoi probably recognizes that the likelihood of the US Congress approving aid for North Vietnam--particularly on the latter's terms--is not very great in any event.

25X1

c.) Any significant increase of Communist military activity in the south would clearly raise the risk of US counteraction, including resumed bombing. But within the Politburo and Central Committee in Hanoi it could be plausibly argued that this risk is not all that great. The US has protested Hanoi's post-January actions in a variety of channels but, to date, these protests have been largely verbal. US actions so far have been limited to continued bombing in Cambodia (which Congressional action may soon complicate), two brief sets of raids in Laos, two reconnaissance overflights of North Vietnam, suspension of mine-clearing operations (offset by the fact that the port of Haiphong is already demonstrably usable) and suspension of aid negotiations (which, given the mood of Congress, were unlikely to bear fruit anyway). None of these actions has really hurt North Vietnam and the Politburo probably assesses the US threshold of tolerance as fairly high. Furthermore, at least some within the Politburo would be likely to argue that in light of recent domestic developments within the United States, President Nixon--this time--really would be reluctant to embark on a course of action sure to provoke additional public and Congressional outcry.

d.) In South Vietnam, the longer the Communists continue on their present course of action, the more Thieu's and the GVN's internal position is likely to improve. If the Communists concentrate for six months on improving their capabilities (e.g., developing their enclaves and base areas) without changing their pattern of pressures against the GVN, Thieu will have six more months to strengthen his own government. The longer the Communists leave Thieu in relatively undisturbed control over most of South Vietnam's population and all of its major cities and towns, the worse will become the actual and image disparity between the GVN and the PRG. (The claims of a "government" whose major town is Loc Ninh are not very impressive to Vietnamese, or foreign, eyes.) Furthermore, though a near-term step up in military pressure could be defended as a response to post-January GVN provocations, a resumption of larger-scale military activity after a prolonged

25X1

period of "normalcy" (i.e., action within the post-January range) will look very much like a case of classic military aggression, not an internal political struggle spilling over into armed conflict.

40. None of the above proves that the Communists plan to launch a major offensive within the next few days or weeks. Given the situation and outlook within the Politburo, however, the Party's scale of priorities, the Communists' overall situation vis-a-vis that of the GVN, especially in the political sphere, and the whole pattern of Communist behavior since 27 January, it is hard to assess North Vietnam's rapid build-up of its southern organization's military capabilities to their present levels as primarily prudential or defensive. Instead, those who subscribe to the Case B analysis would argue that the odds are at least even that within the next two to three months, the Communists will initiate military action within South Vietnam of a type unambiguously different in kind and scale from that which has become "normal" since January. The odds that the North Vietnamese will initiate such action before the end of this year--i.e., early in the next dry season--are even higher.

41. By Case B's analysis, Hanoi does not intend to let the Thieu government grow undisturbed in military and political strength a day longer than the Politburo deems necessary. The Communists' actions of the past few months look very much like their traditional practice of preparing the battlefield. The Politburo itself may not have finally decided just how ambitious its forces ought to be in the military arena. In estimating North Vietnamese intentions and probable Communist actions, however, it is important not to get hung up on our own terminology or enmeshed in the ambiguities of the label "offensive." The kind of actions the North Vietnamese need to achieve and probably intend to essay include isolating and (if possible) overrunning Quang Tri, capturing a major provincial capital such as Tay Ninh, establishing and holding a coastal salient in some area such as Sa Huynh, and opening access to populated areas such as the coastal MR 2

lowlands or the western Mekong delta. Any such actions, or combinations thereof, would undoubtedly be accompanied by widespread heavy harassment elsewhere designed to tie the GVN down and inhibit its reinforcing places under direct attack. Whether this is an "offensive" is a matter of terminological preference. This is the type of military action Case B's proponents feel could be initiated at any time, may well be initiated within the next two months, and probably will be essayed before the end of this calendar year.

* * * * *

42. In general, Case A reflects the views of the Office of National Estimates and the Office of Current Intelligence. Case B reflects the views of the DCI's Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs. The Operations Directorate's East Asian Division and Vietnam Station subscribe to much of the Case A argument as a short term assessment valid through this rainy season (i.e., through September) but the Division and the Station have reservations about extending this line of argument beyond that time frame. The Office of Economic Research (OER) is in general agreement with Case A as it applies to the next one month or so; but on the basis of emerging Communist capabilities, OER considers it risky to discount the possibility of Hanoi's electing to initiate major military action within this calendar year.

A
N
N
E
X
A

ANNEX ANet Assessment of Military CapabilitiesI. The Manpower Balance in IndochinaSouth Vietnam

1. The Communist offensive in 1972 precipitated very high losses for both South Vietnamese and Communist regular combat forces. Despite such losses, both sides kept their main forces intact and during the 1972/73 dry season have been refitting depleted combat units as well as upgrading their respective military capabilities.

2. Since 1 September 1972, North Vietnam has dispatched some 85,000 men in regular infiltration groups and organic units to South Vietnam. Currently, Communist regular combat forces number about 163,000 men in 13 NVA Infantry Divisions as well as numerous independent infantry, armor, artillery and air defense units for a total of 379 maneuver battalions. However, the overall military manpower balance remains decidedly with the GVN. Comparable figures for the Government of Vietnam's forces show 287,000 men in 13 infantry divisions as well as several independent infantry, armor and artillery battalions for a total of 461 maneuver battalions. The GVN also has a larger administrative services support structure than do the Communists. The GVN has a total of 224,000 administrative services personnel compared to the Communist total of about 72,000 men.

3. The quantitative balance of forces in South Vietnam is shown in the table below:

A-1

25X1

Comparison of South Vietnamese and Communist
Military Forces by Military Region 1/
May 1973

	<u>MR 1</u>	<u>MR 2</u>	<u>MR 3</u>	<u>MR 4</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Regular Combat Forces</u>					
South Vietnamese	85,000	57,000	67,000	78,000	287,000
VC/NVA	80,000	29,000	27,000	27,000	163,000
<u>Administrative Services</u>					
South Vietnamese	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	224,000
VC/NVA	23,000	18,000	17,000	14,000	72,000

1/ Communist regular combat forces include personnel in VC/NVA combat, combat support, and air defense units and in local force companies and platoons. There are approximately 16,000 men in air defense units. South Vietnamese figures are based on present-for-duty strengths of ARVN/VNMC combat and combat service support units, 33 Ranger, and 262 Regional Force battalions.

Laos

4. In Laos, the regular combat forces supporting the Royal Laotian Government slightly outnumber those of the Communists. Currently the friendly regular combat forces in Laos total some 68,000 men [redacted] while the Communist regular combat forces total some 58,000 men, (38,000 North Vietnamese and 20,000 Pathet Lao). In addition to the regular combat forces, there are an estimated 25,000 friendly administrative services troops in Laos as opposed to 57,000 support troops for the Communists. However, some 45,000 of these Communist administrative services troops are located in the Laotian Panhandle and are responsible for operating the Ho Chi Minh Trail to South Vietnam and Cambodia. Therefore, only a small portion of these administrative services troops in South Laos are actually supporting the Communist combat units there.

25X1

5. In northern Laos the Communists have a total combat force of some 31,000 men. Of this total 16,000 are NVA organized into nine regiments and independent battalions, and 15,000 men are in the numerous Pathet Lao and Dissident Neutralists units. Communist combat forces in southern Laos number about 27,000 men, some 22,000 NVA and 5,000 Pathet Lao. A comparison of Communist and friendly forces in northern and southern Laos is presented in the table below:

Table

Communist and Friendly Forces in Laos
May 1973

	<u>Total</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>South</u>
Communist Regular Combat			
Total	<u>58,000</u>	<u>31,000</u>	<u>27,000</u>
NVA	38,000	16,000	22,000
Pathet Lao	20,000	15,000	5,000
Friendly Regular Combat			
Total	<u>68,000</u>	<u>N/A</u>	<u>N/A</u>
Communist Administrative Services			
Total	<u>57,000</u>	<u>12,000</u>	<u>45,000</u>
NVA	47,000	6,000	41,000
Pathet Lao	10,000	6,000	4,000
Friendly Administrative Services			
Total	<u>25,000</u>	<u>N/A</u>	<u>N/A</u>

25X1

Cambodia

6. In Cambodia, the government holds a decided numerical superiority over the Khmer Communists. FANK is estimated to have a regular ground combat strength of from 125,000 to 150,000 men while the KC are estimated to have only 40,000 to 50,000 men in that category. However, 70,000 to 85,000 of FANK's combat strength lies in territorial companies and battalions whose primary mission is the defense of fixed positions. The remaining 55,000 to 65,000 men are incorporated into a mobile reserve force built around four infantry divisions. It is this 55,000 to 65,000 man force that is generally called upon to conduct offensive operations against positions held by the KC.

7. In addition to regular combat strength, FANK is supported by some 60,000 administrative services personnel, while the KC are backed by an unknown number of support and guerrilla/militia personnel. There are also some 5,000 VC/NVA combat troops and 28,400 VC/NVA administrative services personnel in Cambodia, but most of these personnel are engaged in supporting Communist operations inside South Vietnam. A comparison of FANK, KC and VC combat and administrative services strengths is shown in the table below:

Table

Comparison of FANK and Communist
Military Forces May 1973

	<u>FANK</u>	<u>KC</u>	<u>VC/NVA</u>
Regular Combat	125-150,000	40-50,000	5,000
Administrative Services	60,000	N/A*	28,400

*There is not enough information available to permit quantification of KC administrative services.

II. Firepower Balance in Indochina

South Vietnam

8. Hanoi's commitment of tanks and artillery to Communist military forces in South Vietnam this dry season appears to have at least equaled the number sent south a year ago for the Communist offensive in the spring of 1972. Since virtually all of the tanks and artillery have now arrived, the Communists will enter the 1973 wet season in probably their strongest firepower position of the war. Furthermore, the firepower is dispersed more widely throughout the country this year--as attested by the large number of tanks and artillery which deployed to southern South Vietnam--in marked contrast to a year ago, when the emphasis was on MR 1.

9. Currently, it is estimated that Hanoi has sent some 600 tanks south since late October 1972, surpassing the number committed to South Vietnam a year ago.* Moreover, about one-third of the total number of regular infiltration groups destined for South Vietnam and Cambodia this year are estimated to be artillery groups, both field and antiaircraft (AAA) artillery. In addition, seven integral air defense regiments deployed from North Vietnam (four) and Laos (three) into the northern half of South Vietnam since early January 1973. Combined, these artillery groups and units are estimated to have a total of some 700 weapons--200 field (including 122-mm and 130-mm) and more than 500 AAA guns--compared to about 1,000 such weapons sent south last dry season.

10. There also have been improvements in the firepower position of South Vietnam's Armed Forces (RVNAF). Currently, the South Vietnamese military forces are estimated to have more than 1,000 medium

*The upward revision of the tank estimate results from the recent arrival of the 201st NVA Armor Regiment in South Vietnam and the retroactive identification of two infiltration groups as armor groups.

and light tanks, 120 175-mm guns, and over 2,000 155-mm and 105-mm artillery howitzers. In comparing field artillery, however, the Communists' 122-mm and 130-mm guns are superior overall with respect to range, accuracy, and rate of fire to the RVNAF field guns. Thus, despite the large number of weapons as well as tanks in the RVNAF inventory, with the withdrawal of US air assets Hanoi's relative firepower position is probably better than at any time in the past.

11. In addition to its armor and artillery, North Vietnam also has the capability to mount limited offensive air operations in support of Communist ground forces in South Vietnam. The Communists currently have about 200 MIG-15, MIG-17, MIG-19, and MIG-21 aircraft in the north. Although these aircraft have been used exclusively in a defensive role against US aircraft, they could be converted and used in a tactical support role relatively easily. North Vietnam also has eight IL-28 light bombers which have sufficient range to be used against targets in South Vietnam. Although the South Vietnamese Air Force has some 425 attack aircraft with which to counter the North Vietnamese, the principal deterrent to Hanoi in launching limited offensive air operations in the south through at least this coming wet season probably is the threat of US retaliation.

Laos

12. Combined US and Laotian air power has been the leveling influence offsetting the Communist ground superiority in Laos. Increasingly, however, Hanoi has upgraded its firepower to counteract the friendly air capability. Although the size and extent of the Communist deployment of long-range field guns, anti-aircraft artillery, and tanks to Laos has been far below the level of its firepower deployment into South Vietnam, it has had a significant impact in improving Communist capabilities.

25X1

13. The backbone of the Royal Lao Government's large caliber artillery is a total of some 85 105-mm and 155-mm howitzers, which are no match for the Communists' 122-mm and 130-mm field guns. Thus, with the firepower balance on the ground clearly in favor of the Communists, the ability of the FAR/FAN to withstand enemy action in the future will depend largely on the augmentation of both the Lao Government's air power and artillery. Although progress is being made in both these areas, the prospects through the end of the 1973 rainy season are not good.

14. With its currently available 82 combat aircraft, the RLAF will not be able to compensate for the loss of US air power even if it reaches its full combat potential. These aircraft would be no match for the sophisticated North Vietnamese air defenses. Although North Vietnam has never flown any airstrikes in Laos in support of PL/NVA ground forces, Hanoi--as in South Vietnam--has the capability to do so. Moreover, the current aircraft in the RLAF inventory are not capable of preventing such airstrikes by the North Vietnamese.

Cambodia

15. The Communists have not yet employed the large-caliber heavy weapons against government forces in Cambodia which they have used effectively in South Vietnam and Laos. The Khmer Communists are occasionally noted using 105-mm howitzers and 122-mm rockets, but their inventory of such weapons is believed to be relatively small, and most attacks are limited to mortar and recoilless rifle fire.

16. In contrast, FANK is reasonably well equipped, but its fire support capability remains limited. The artillery corps only has a limited number of 105-mm howitzers and is generally incapable of effectively supporting troops in the field. Thus on balance it seems that neither FANK nor the KC appear to have a clear firepower advantage on the ground.

25X1

17. The Cambodian Air Force is fairly competent, but it is small and flies an average of only 10-15 strike sorties a day. Many of these are against days-old targets, much to the detriment of ground forces who are in need of more immediate close air support. Moreover, in the recent heavy fighting, FANK has relied much more on US strikes than on less effective Cambodian strikes, which have not been a key factor in the firepower balance.

III. The Logistical Situation

18. The Communists' 1972/73 dry season military resupply campaign is now in its final stages, and large--possibly record--quantities of supplies--including virtually every type of ordnance and military equipment--have been dispatched to South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Ammunition shipments alone are estimated to have amounted to from 24,000 to more than 30,000 tons.

19. Many of these supplies have already moved into South Vietnam; the remainder either has been stockpiled or is still moving in contiguous areas. Deducting ammunition expended or destroyed during the past six months, we estimate that there is currently enough ammunition in or en route to South Vietnam to sustain fighting at recent levels for 12 to 21 months, or at levels comparable to the 1972 offensive for at least six months. Moreover, if the North Vietnamese were to renew heavy fighting, they could move additional quantities of ammunition into northern South Vietnam relatively easily.

20. The first sign of a major pickup in logistic activity occurred in October, when COMINT detected a surge in supply shipments through the Binh Tram 18 area in the central Panhandle of North Vietnam. By November, the pace of Communist logistic activity in Laos and Cambodia was beginning to increase. Following initial emphasis on road repair and local resupply, priority soon shifted to the southward movement of supplies for South Vietnam.

The second phase of the Communists' dry season campaign, designed to move a large share of the military supplies previously brought into the southern part of North Vietnam, was apparently kicked off in early February. From 1 February into early March, more than 9,000 tons of food and ordnance were moved into Laos via the Ban Karai Pass alone. During that five-week period the rate of delivery of supplies through Ban Karai was the highest ever detected there. Meanwhile, large amounts of supplies also were moving into Laos on roads west of the DMZ and directly across the DMZ into northern South Vietnam.

21. The third phase of the dry season transportation effort began in mid-March, with an emphasis on moving supplies already in Laos into the northern half of South Vietnam or farther south to Cambodia and southern South Vietnam. It is scheduled to continue through May and currently appears to be culminating in a massive supply push through southern Laos toward South Vietnam's MR-2 and possibly points south. During this phase Communist logistic activity appears to have peaked in Cambodia.

22. Although evidence on the quantities of supplies which have actually been delivered to the various battlefields of South Vietnam is fragmentary, a few examples demonstrate the success of this dry season's resupply campaign. Recent COMINT intercepts have revealed stockpiles of almost 7,500 tons of ordnance in northwestern MR-1 (from the DMZ to the A Shau Valley) alone. Much of this materiel was moved directly across the DMZ from North Vietnam, while the remainder arrived by the back door, through Laos. In the A Shau region roughly 6,000 tons of supplies, largely rice, are among recent deliveries reflected in COMINT. Farther south, COMINT of 30 April indicated that at least 1,100 tons of cargo had already been transported into the central highlands, and that an additional 4,500 tons were to be shipped before 20 May. Most of the goods probably comprised military equipment and ordnance. This drive follows a sustained effort directed toward that

area during much of the dry season, despite the relatively low level of fighting there. Backstopping this activity are large quantities of supplies stockpiled in southern Laos: one logistical element near the tri-border, for example, recently reported having about 2,500 tons of supplies--both food and military supplies--on hand.

23. By June, the cumulative effect of seasonal rains will reduce Communist capability to truck supplies through the Laos Panhandle. Many units will remove vehicles from use until September or October and logistic activity will be at a relatively low level. The Communists could, however, maintain through the summer a substantial movement of supplies across the DMZ into MR-1 and, by using waterways between Laos and Cambodia.

IV. Regional Analysis

Summary

24. From the standpoint of manpower and logistics, the Communists have the best capability for carrying out a major offensive during the summer months in MRs 1 and 3. Hanoi's forces in these regions could severely test ARVN, threaten major population centers, and possibly capture some provincial capitals. In MR-1 the rainy season will not begin until next fall, while, in MR-3, especially the northern part, short supply lines will mitigate the effect of the rainy weather. In contrast, North Vietnamese capabilities in the lowlands of MR-2 and probably throughout MR-4 are limited to road interdiction, attacking isolated outposts, and tying down ARVN forces. In the highlands of MR-2, the enemy could launch multi-regimental attacks, but could not capture and hold any provincial capitals. However, heavy seasonal rains would hamper Communist armor and artillery mobility. South Vietnamese forces are in a maximum defensive posture countrywide, and no General Reserve currently exists for speedy deployment to high threat areas, as was done in 1972.

A-10

25. The Communists have the capability to undertake major military activity in either northern or southern Laos. Although Communist forces will be increasingly restricted by the coming rains, it seems likely that the RLG would be unable to cope with such an offensive without massive outside assistance. In Cambodia, logistical constraints associated with the rains probably will reduce only slightly the Communists' capability to maintain heavy pressure on FANK and against major LOCs.

South Vietnam

Military Region 1

26. Currently, Communist regular combat forces in Military Region (MR) 1 are estimated to be about 80,000 men representing the highest level of the war. The Communist main force threat is highest in the two northern provinces of MR-1--Quang Tri and Thua Thien--where an estimated 60,000 regular combat forces in four infantry divisions* and 15 air defense, two armor, seven artillery, and ten independent infantry regiments are opposing roughly 50,000 South Vietnamese combat troops in three infantry divisions. In the three southern provinces, there are about 20,000 Communist regular combat forces in two infantry divisions opposing about 35,000 South Vietnamese combat troops in two infantry divisions. The military region net balance of forces, however, is roughly comparable to that which existed during the 1972 offensive.

27. Nevertheless, compared to last year, the Communists control most of the rural areas and have deployed their main force units near major cities and towns throughout the military region. Moreover, they have access to large base areas with secure lines of communication near the Laos/South Vietnam border and

*This does not include any of the 308th Division or the headquarters and divisional support of the 312th Division which redeployed to North Vietnam in January and April, respectively.

have distributed this year's armor and long range artillery--130-mm and 122-mm field guns--more evenly throughout the military region. These factors, together with the current maximum defensive deployment of South Vietnamese combat units, would allow the Communists to concentrate any military efforts, over the next several months, on key target areas surrounding large cities such as Quang Tri, Hue, Da Nang, and Quang Ngai.

28. Logistically, the Communists are in a very strong position in MR-1. Large stockpiles of ammunition and other military goods are now on hand south of the DMZ and along the western border of the region, as evidenced by recent COMINT reflecting the storage of almost 7,500 tons of ordnance in that area alone. Stocks of this magnitude, together with the area's proximity to North Vietnam will enable the Communists to support logistically any level of tactical activity they desire in MR-1.

29. Bad weather, which will not constrain Communist logistical and combat operations in MR-1 until October, will pose fewer problems this year as a result of extensive new Communist road and base area construction. The establishment of large storage facilities, such as those recently identified in photography around Dong Ha and Khe Sanh in northern Quang Tri Province, and in the A Shau Valley and near Kham Duc in western MR-1, will enable the Communists to rely more heavily upon in-country stocks than in the past and thus shorten their supply lines to the major combat areas. Movement along the corridors will also be eased by important new improvements to the Communist road system both along the western border and eastward into the coastal lowlands and the POL pipelines being extended within northeast Quang Tri from North Vietnam and along the Routes 922 and 966 entry corridors from Laos.

A-12

Military Region 2

30. At the present time, the Communists have some 29,000 combat troops deployed in Military Region 2. Most of the strike force consists of 10 infantry regiments and one artillery and one air defense regiment. Within the military region, the disposition of VC/NVA combat forces and the relative main force threat has not changed appreciably over the past year. More than half--16,000--of the military region's combat troops (including two infantry divisions supported by armor, long range artillery, and air defense units) are located in the Central Highlands area. The other key area in which the Communists have main force units deployed is Binh Dinh Province, where the 3rd NVA Division is operating with some 4,000 troops.

31. Saigon has its forces deployed in an almost identical fashion to the Communists. The South Vietnamese have a total of 57,000 combat troops in Military Region 2. Roughly 30,000 men are deployed in the Central Highlands including one infantry division supported by armor and ranger units. The other principal concentration of forces includes the 22nd Division in Binh Dinh Province.

32. Logistically, the VC/NVA have the capability to escalate the fighting sharply in the western highlands of MR-2, but except for Binh Dinh Province they cannot support a sustained offensive in the coastal lowlands. Supplies have been moving into the B-3 Front from Laos and Cambodia at a fast rate throughout much of the current dry season, which is now climaxing in this area with a Communist effort to move over 5,000 tons of supplies--mostly military equipment and ordnance--into the B-3 Front before the end of May. This quantity of supplies is far in excess of current Communist requirements. Ample stockpiles of food apparently are also on hand. Aerial reconnaissance over the past several months has revealed a regular flow of supplies eastward along the Route 19 system from Cambodia--a traditional source of food--and a recently intercepted message revealed

that nearly 2,500 tons of supplies--of which 1,000 tons were identified as rice--were in storage in the tri-border area.

33. To house their in-country stocks the Communists have developed numerous new base camps and cache sites in northern Kontum Province and along the western border with Cambodia. The Communists in MR-2 have also been building new roads to improve their logistic capabilities in both the highlands and in coastal Binh Dinh Province.

Military Region 3

34. Communist regular combat forces in MR-3 should be well rested and in good condition for offensive operations during the coming wet season. Over the last several months the activity of Communist main force units has been limited to occasional harassing attacks, training, and integrating newly arrived personnel from North Vietnam into combat units.

35. At present there are some 27,000 VC/NVA combat personnel in MR-3 organized into two divisions, three commands (armor, artillery and sapper) and six independent infantry regiments. In contrast to previous years, these personnel are supported by long range artillery--122-mm and 130-mm field guns--for the first time, and by many more tanks. While the mobility of these heavy weapons will be constrained during the wet season, they still could be employed against ARVN forces. Also, low hanging clouds would retard South Vietnamese air operations.

36. Opposing the Communists in MR-3 are roughly 67,000 ARVN combat troops in three infantry divisions supported by ranger, armor, and regional force units. While the government force in MR-3 is more than double that of the Communists, it is charged with defending all government-held territory from attack. This would allow the Communists to concentrate their forces for

selected engagements. Thus, the Communists will have the offensive capability to severely test particular government positions should they decide to do so.

37. The Communists also have been developing a strong logistical base in MR-3--particularly along the Cambodian/MR-3 border--this dry season. Their control of the border area has provided them unrestricted use of major roads in northern Tay Ninh, Binh Long, and Phuoc Long Provinces, which, according to almost daily reports from South Vietnamese aerial observers, have supported a steady stream of eastbound trucks, many of them towing antiaircraft or heavy artillery pieces. The Communists have also newly constructed large, permanent storage and communications facilities east of the Cambodian border.

38. Besides receiving cargo from the north through the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the Communists in MR-3 have also been acquiring large quantities of supplies from internal sources in recent months. Reportedly a flourishing trade with local merchants has been established, and legally licensed agents have been used on a regular basis to purchase food and other goods in Saigon and other urban markets and deliver the supplies to the Communists.

39. As the dry season draws to a close the Communists have built up a logistic capability to launch major offensive activity in MR-3. A capability to sustain major operations, however, will be diminished during the wet season when problems of supply distribution and weapon maneuverability begin to appear. In the western border areas, where supplies are both abundant and close at hand, the effect of the rainy season will be less.

Military Region 4

40. Communist capabilities for large scale offensive activity in the Delta during the rainy season will be less than those for other areas of South Vietnam. Significant personnel losses have continued in

the Delta since the ceasefire and most of the combat units are estimated to be understrength. The heavy rains and flooding associated with the wet season, coupled with the open terrain and canals which criss-cross the area, will limit the concentration of main force units primarily to GVN controlled lines-of-communication.

41. Currently, Communist strength in the Delta is estimated to be about 27,000 men in two infantry divisions and 11 independent infantry regiments concentrated in Dinh Tuong, Kien Phong and Chuong Thien Provinces, and in the Cambodia border area of Chau Doc Province. Some increase in the strength of Communist combat forces in the military region can be expected as recently arrived infiltrators are integrated into understrength combat units over the next month or so. On the other hand, South Vietnamese combat forces are roughly three times that of the Communists numbering about 78,000 men in three infantry divisions supported by ranger, armor, and regional force units.

42. Given the above conditions and barring a major redeployment of GVN troops out of the Delta, a significant deterioration of the South Vietnamese position in the Delta over the wet season appears unlikely. However, the Communists still retain enough punch in several areas of the Delta--notably Dinh Tuong and Chuong Thien Provinces and the border areas of Chau Doc and Kien Phong Provinces--to overrun isolated positions and temporarily interdict lines of communication.

43. The Communists have substantially improved their logistic position in MR-4 this dry season by rebuilding stockpiles along the eastern Cambodian border. They have been relatively less successful, however, in moving supplies into the interior of the Delta. Their capability to logistically support offensive military actions is, therefore, strongest along the Cambodian border and in those areas in the Delta--Base Area 470 in western Dinh Tuong Province

and the U Minh Forest area of southern Kien Giang and adjacent Chuong Thien Province--that have continued to receive regular supply shipments. Although a shift to waterborne traffic will probably ensure a continuing flow of supplies into the Delta during the wet season, localized supply shortages, similar to those observed last year, will probably reappear.

Laos

44. The Communists continue to maintain substantial combat and administrative services forces in both northern and southern Laos. NVA forces in Laos are roughly comparable in equipment and effectiveness to NVA forces in South Vietnam. They have borne the major brunt of Communist-initiated combat operations and are the best disciplined and led troops fighting in Laos. The Pathet Lao (PL) are used primarily to hold and administer an area, once taken, and in a sense their role is "pacification."

45. Currently, there are approximately 31,000 Communist combat troops in northern Laos in nine NVA regiments and independent battalions, as well as numerous PL units. In southern Laos, Communist combat troops number some 27,000 men in nine NVA regiments and independent battalions as well as PL units. These troops are opposed by 68,000 friendly ground combat troops throughout Laos comprised of Royal Lao Army (FAR), pro-government neutralists (FAN), guerrilla forces [redacted]

25X1

46. It is clear that friendly forces have been outmatched by the combined combat forces of the NVA and the PL. Apart from the element of firepower, the most serious liability facing FAR/FAN forces has been the lack of motivated leadership and fighting spirit. The morale of FAR/FAN troops reached its nadir immediately before the ceasefire and has risen somewhat since that time. The basic problems of low pay, poor training, and inadequate leadership, however, continue unabated. The combat effectiveness of the Meo--generally considered to be the best of the Laotian troops--has declined considerably during the past two years of

heavy fighting. Moreover, [] cannot be counted on to resist any sustained NVA pressure without US tactical air support. By comparison, there have been relatively few signs of morale problems among either the PL or the NVA troops serving in Laos. Both forces have, in general, fought effectively and well, even under difficult combat conditions. Although the tactical initiative during the previous wet season has traditionally rested with the friendly forces, Communist forces do have the capability to launch major offensive activity in northern and southern Laos. It seems likely that the RLG would be unable to cope with such an offensive, barring massive outside assistance.

25X1

47. An important by-product of North Vietnam's extensive use of the Laos Panhandle as a supply corridor to South Vietnam is that all types of supplies, well in excess of requirements, are readily available to Communist tactical forces in southern Laos. Because of the dual role of the logistical system through southern Laos, it is impossible to delineate exactly which supplies are earmarked for internal use and which are to be transshipped to South Vietnam. In any case, there has never been any evidence of serious shortages of supplies for the tactical forces in the Panhandle.

48. The current picture is no different. With the heavy dry season effort behind them, and in the absence of US bombing, the Communists' position in southern Laos is certainly very strong. Many of the thousands of tons of supplies that have moved into southern Laos this dry season remain there now, either because they were delivered for use there, or because Laos now provides a bomb-free sanctuary adjacent to important areas of tactical activity in South Vietnam and Cambodia. These stockpiles give the Communists in southern Laos the capability to support logistically any foreseeable level of combat for an extended period.

49. The Communists also are in a strong logistic position in North Laos. The North Vietnamese are just completing a successful dry season resupply campaign

in the North, much of it directed toward the PDJ area. From 1 October through the end of January, some 2,000 tons of ammunition and more than 800 tons of food, petroleum, and unidentified cargo were detected moving out Route 7--a more or less routine resupply effort. After the ceasefire in South Vietnam went into effect on 27 January, however, the urgency of resupplying NVA units in northern Laos became more pronounced. Intercepted communications disclosed a campaign to move an unprecedented quantity--6,600 tons--of materiel to northern Laos during the first 22 days of February. Subsequent intercepts detected about 2,000 tons being moved in the period (virtually all of it identified as ordnance) and it seems likely that a large part of the remaining tonnage also was moved into northern Laos undetected.

50. Since 1 March, supplies have continued to be shipped to northern Laos although at a pace well below that observed in February. Also, roads to the PDJ have been upgraded this spring, easing the movement of supplies to forward areas, and there have been indications that the movement of supplies west from storage areas at Ban Ban is at high levels.

51. All things considered, the Communists probably have sufficient supplies in northern Laos to cover almost any option they might choose in the next several months, including major offensive operations.

Cambodia

52. Despite a three-to-one superiority in combat forces, it appears unlikely that FANK will be able to substantially improve its position during the current rainy season, and further deterioration cannot be precluded. Since the collapse of operation CHENLA II in late 1971, FANK has displayed a lack of offensive spirit, and has remained defensively clustered around lines of communication and major towns. With increasing emphasis on the defense of fixed positions, mobility has declined, and reaction to enemy initiatives has been sluggish and poorly planned. The KC, on the

other hand, have become increasingly adept at concentrating multi-battalion and multi-regimental forces for attacks against FANK and have taken advantage of the unrestricted movement throughout most of the country afforded them by FANK's lack of aggressiveness.

53. During the current rainy season, the Communists should be capable of maintaining the interdiction of Routes 1 and 2 and cause continued disruption along--if not the interdiction of--the Mekong. With on-going improvement, they probably will be capable of bringing heavier pressure to bear against other land routes as well. Moreover, the loss of one or more provincial capitals now in friendly hands cannot be precluded. The loss of Phnom Penh, on the other hand, appears highly unlikely, provided the bulk of its defensive garrison is not deployed elsewhere and is competently led.

54. KC forces face few logistical constraints over the next several months. They are virtually self-sufficient in non-military supplies such as food, clothing, medicine, and POL, but rely heavily on the VC/NVA for weapons and ammunition.

25X1

[redacted] a part of the large quantities of supplies moved south through southern Laos and eastern Cambodia by the North Vietnamese this dry season was earmarked specifically for the KC. When a ceasefire agreement appeared imminent late last year, the North Vietnamese relocated most of their force strength back to their old base areas along the eastern Cambodia border. This VC/NVA departure from the west bank of the Mekong has not visibly affected Communist supply traffic in the central and western provinces; in fact, aerial observers report waterborne and overland traffic over known LOCs to the west has not diminished, indicating that the NVA probably left some of their rear services units behind and are still maintaining direct ties to the main NVA resupply conduit--the Mekong, and overland Routes 97/975 and 13.

25X1

[redacted] the existence of separate KC supply lines leading from major Vietnamese supply depots in Kratie and Kompong Cham Provinces. Thus, although our information is fragmentary and incomplete, it appears that the KC also still maintain joint KC/NVA ordnance stockpiles west of the Mekong which they can draw on.

25X1

25X1

A
N
N
E
X
B

ANNEX BRecent Communist Construction Activity

1. During the current dry season the North Vietnamese have substantially increased and strengthened their logistic ties to South Vietnam. Although substantial improvement was again made to the Ho Chi Minh Trail running through southern Laos and eastern Cambodia, most construction this year--particularly since the cease-fire--has been aimed at improving North Vietnamese access into and between Communist controlled areas in South Vietnam. Indeed, if the LOC improvements already detected in South Vietnam during the past 6-8 months are pieced together and several gaps extrapolated, a strong case can be made that the North Vietnamese intend to open a motorable in-country route extending from the DMZ southward along the western border of South Vietnam into MR-3, and possibly farther on to COSVN Headquarters in Tay Ninh Province--a total distance of some 450 miles.

2. This season has also seen the addition of two new petroleum pipelines into GVN MR-1, complementing the original pipeline pushed quickly through the eastern DMZ during the 1972 spring offensive. Additionally, there are indications that the North Vietnamese intend to open a series of airstrips in South Vietnam and southern Laos, presumably to ferry priority cargos and prominent personnel between major Communist base areas on small transport aircraft.

3. The extension and linkup of in-country truck routes and petroleum pipeline between VC/NVA main force strongholds is a marked change from past Communist dry season efforts which kept their logistic activities in South Vietnam at a low profile because

B-1

25X1

of the threat of Allied air and ground attack. The recent emphasis on in-country LOC development is significant both in terms of Communist military strategy and in legitimizing Communist presence in South Vietnam. Militarily, the North Vietnamese have committed themselves to a conventional warfare stance with the introduction this season of heavy modern mobile systems. With their large arsenal of tanks, heavy artillery, SAMs, and fleets of trucks, they require: (1) well protected, high-capacity resupply lines with large storage facilities, and (2) tactical mobility, or high speed arteries for rapid movement of armor and troops between battlefronts. No longer does the motorable part of the Ho Chi Minh Trail end at or near the western South Vietnam border crossing points. Now, as a result of recent construction, North Vietnamese supplies and troops can be trucked directly into all but a few of the major Communist strongholds in South Vietnam.

Construction of Facilities in South Vietnam

MR-1

4. North Vietnamese construction units have been active this dry season--especially after the January cease-fire date--in each of the four GVN Military Regions, but by far the major effort has been detected in MR-1, and has touched all modes of transport--air, water, and road. Most significant has been the construction of a roadnet stretching from the DMZ south along the length of the western MR-1 border, making connection with each of the still heavily traveled cross-border routes extending from the Ho Chi Minh Trail in southern Laos. A gap of only some 10 miles south of A Shau remained uncompleted on this network as of late April (see map).

5. The northern half of this new "in-country" north-south system (north of A Shau) was one of several motorable roads pushed across the DMZ to support the Communist armored offensive in Quang Tri in 1972. Since early this year, large sections of this part of the system between the Route 9 junction at Khe Sanh and the A Shau Valley have been extensively repaired, realigned, and upgraded by the application of a bitumen all-weather surface. New road construction work has been concentrated south of the A Shau, with the reopening and realigning of abandoned parts of Routes 548, 614 and 14 which together provide access into GVN MR-2. Road construction detected farther south along the western MR-2 border strongly suggests the southern terminus of this new network may be several hundred miles south in MR-3. More important for the near term is the persuasive evidence from photography [redacted]

25X1

25X1

[redacted] that the Communists intend the MR-1 portion to become a major resupply corridor serving a number of new or upgraded motorable feeder roads leading east into the coastal lowlands. This western MR-1 north-south routing paralleling the alternate Laotian Panhandle road system would provide a more direct route from North Vietnam storage depots, and would not be subject to the rainy season hazard that cripples truck transport in southern Laos during the summer months.

6. With one exception, the lateral extensions leading eastward into the South Vietnam lowlands generally follow existing GVN roads now under Communist control; consequently, only minimal road repairs were required to make them serviceable for trucks. Route 547 leaves the north-south corridor north of A Shau and provides access into the outlying districts of Hue. "Gorman's Road" is the second active lateral offshoot, leading out of the mountains some 10 miles south of Route 547 and extending into central Thua Thien Province where it presumably supports NVA main force units west of Hue.

B-3

25X1

7. The two southernmost feeder routes exit the still uncompleted Route 14 part of the north-south system, indicating truck traffic currently flowing eastward in this area is still coming across the border from southern Laos via Route 165/966. The first of these two routes fed from Laos is Route 534 which leads on into Que Son Valley base camps bordering east central Quang Nam and Quang Tin Provinces. Aerial photography of mid to late February revealed the Communists for some time had been constructing a new road from the Route 165-966 border crossing point some 70 miles southeastward into the coastal lowlands of Quang Ngai Province. The photography indicates that the western half of the road was already sustaining vehicle traffic. Construction is still underway on the eastern half which branches northward to within 24 miles of Quang Ngai City. A southern branch extends southeast of the city and probably will link up with Communist-controlled Route 5B, which leads farther south along the Quang Ngai/Kontum Province border where the VC/NVA maintain support bases.

8. Evidence of pipeline construction in MR-1 from Laos near cross-border exit Routes 9222 and 165/966 is additional evidence that the North Vietnamese intend to turn their newly built and acquired in-country roads into a major resupply route. Although photography [] has detected only three miles of pipeline trace at each of the new locations, both lines doubtless extend from the trunk pipeline in central Laos and probably already lead some distance into MR-1.

25X1

9. Rounding out recent Communist logistic developments in MR-1 are the continuing refurbishing of the airstrips at Khe Sanh and Dong Ha, and the opening of a small coastal transshipment facility at Dong Ha for the receipt of seaborne deliveries from

B-4

25X1

25X1

southern North Vietnam ports. At Khe Sanh, a new 5,200-foot PSP runway is now more than 60% complete and can accommodate small fixed wing transports like the AN-2. When fully completed, the airfield could be used by MIGs.

MR-2

10. In MR-2 logistical improvements have been centered in the B-3 Front area in Kontum and Pleiku Provinces. As in Quang Tri Province, extensive new road construction activity was detected some months before the start of last year's offensive. During the offensive the roads supported the tank and heavy artillery assaults launched around the Kontum and Pleiku Provincial capitals. Since the Vietnam cease-fire aerial reconnaissance has shown extensive new road clearing and road improvement near the Route 19 exit into Pleiku Province. New road construction in this area may have been undertaken to provide the North Vietnamese with bypass routes around the Communist legal entry point at Duc Co.

11. Photography [redacted] revealed additional roadway rapidly being cleared north and south of Route 19 along a course paralleling the western border of Kontum and Pleiku Provinces. The major construction effort was south of Route 19 where [redacted] some 52 miles of new road alignment was observed. Although a lack of photographic coverage precluded a determination of the extent of this new road, it probably extends beyond this point, possibly down to Route 14, sections of which in northern MR-3 they may control. When added to the much improved Route 613/615 system extending north of Route 19 to the tri-border and Route 14, this 52-mile segment could be considered as the southern extension of the new north-south route leading from the DMZ through MR-1. A sizable

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

gap of about 60-70 miles along Route 14 north of the tri-border separates the current motorable parts of this system; however, [] photography showed that some 25 miles of this gap was being cleared.

25X1

12. In northern coastal Binh Dinh Province other VC/NVA units reportedly are building a new motorable road extending northeast from Route 514 to within 5 miles of the small sea port of Sa Huynh.

MRs 3 and 4

13. Although recent Communist logistic-related construction in MRs 3 and 4 has been less than in MRs 1 and 2, the difference in scale is misleading because the highly developed road and water transport systems in the southern regions obviate the need for major new construction. The most significant construction project in the southern part of the country has been the building of a secret cross-border truck route from Mimot in Kompong Cham Province, Cambodia, into Tay Ninh Province. []

25X1

[] construction is intended to permit continued movement of military supplies into Tay Ninh, once the nearby parallel legal entry Route 22 is finally manned by ICCS personnel. As of late April, however, both the legal route and the new road from Mimot were still supporting considerable military truck and tank traffic. In neighboring Binh Long and Binh Duong Provinces, the VC/NVA are reopening an abandoned route leading southward from Route 113 to their base camps and storage areas near the Saigon River in northwestern Binh Duong.

14. In MR-4, there have been few and relatively unimportant Communist logistic improvements. []

25X1

[] "Sampan Alley," a long-used cross-border water supply corridor leading from Cambodian border base areas into Dinh Tuong Province is being deepened so that larger capacity boats can use it. Of more significance to the Communists' military resupply posture in MR-4 are the decaying FANK defenses opposite the GVN border and along the

B-6

25X1

Gulf of Thailand. Currently FANK holds only a few isolated outposts and population centers in south-eastern Cambodia, most of which are under siege and in mid-April the coastal town of Kep in Kampot Province was captured without a fight. Kep has a long history as a major supply base for the Communists and as a source for seaborne infiltration boats going to the U Minh and other VC/NVA "secret zones" in the lower Delta.

Southern Laos and Cambodia

15. Communist logistic improvements in Laos and Cambodia this dry season generally reflect a carry-over of last year's impressive campaign to expand and upgrade the overland supply system extending through southern Laos and eastern Cambodia to the B-3 Front and COSVN areas. Measured in miles of new construction, road building in southern Laos and Cambodia during the 1972-73 season falls considerably short of past achievements. Aside from a major new road construction project in eastern Cambodia, the North Vietnamese focussed on maintaining and streamlining the existing roadnet. New connector roads were built between major corridors, new bypasses were built to shorten distances, and improved bridging facilities were added.

16. Beginning in October last year, aerial reconnaissance reports began noting the existence of a new road across the Bolovens Plateau and linking up finally with Route 97 in Cambodia. Because of a lack of photographic coverage over this area, it is impossible to determine when the road was built; however, it was not until this dry season that its use was reflected in COMINT. Even now this road is seeing only light use.

17. Probably the most significant new Communist construction project noted outside South Vietnam this

season has been the 80-mile extension of cross-border Route 97/975 from the vicinity of Stung Treng south to Route 132, which joins with Route 13 to which joins with Route 13 to provide a direct route into VC/NVA border base areas opposite GVN MR-3. The construction undertaken prior to the cease-fire was completed in early March. Since then the road has been heavily used. Coincident with the completion of this road, signs of vehicle traffic on parallel Route 13 began to diminish, and pilots recently reported that this once heavily traveled road is now carrying light traffic and shows little maintenance work. The new road offers not only better concealment from aerial detection, but traverses terrain nearly free from watercrossings, which will promote rainy season use.

18. The North Vietnamese have also steadily improved Route 19 leading east of Stung Treng to the South Vietnamese border this dry season. New alignments have been cleared under the dense canopy to hide vehicle activity, and bypass bridges, ferries, and fords have been added to ease through truck movement in the event of bombing, and numerous underground revetments have been dug by bulldozers alongside the eastern half of the road for additional protection of trucks and supplies.

A
N
N
E
X
C

ANNEX CThe Weather Factor

1. Historically, the alternating periods of dry, wet, and transitional weather in Indochina have played an important role in the timing and duration of Communist offensive operations. Weather has always been and will continue to be an ingredient in North Vietnamese contingency planning for exercising their military options. Weather in the area is governed by the Southwest (June-September) and Northeast Monsoons (October-May). Currently the area is in a transitional weather phase ushering in four months of generally wet weather for Laos, Cambodia, and all but the northern part of South Vietnam.

2. Rainfall patterns do not necessarily coincide with the monsoonal wind flow, however. The rugged topography of the area causes many variations in the pattern. Thus, the approaching Southwest Monsoon produces generally wet weather throughout most of the area, but these winds dry out as they cross the Annam Range, bringing clear and dry weather to the northern region of South Vietnam. Rice paddies are baked dry, providing the best conditions for ground campaigns while the clear skies facilitate air operations. In most of central and southern South Vietnam and in Laos and Cambodia the same monsoon brings heavy rains that constrains Communist tactical and supply operations. In mountainous areas the rains trigger landslides and floods which close many roads and make foot travel difficult. Cross-country movement also becomes difficult through the lowlands, and some areas are inundated.

3. Wet seasons are not uniformly wet even in those areas affected, and some seasons are wetter than others. On some days no rain falls and on others,

after a heavy rainfall, there are many hours of generally good weather. Although these variations could permit local military initiatives and resupply, they are too sporadic and temporary to be used to mount sustained high points.

4. Manpower considerations aside, Hanoi's 1972 offensive is a good guide on how crucial an ingredient weather is. From late March through September the Communists sustained an offensive in MR-1 where weather was dry, inhibiting neither military activity nor logistic support. Similarly, fighting did not diminish in the central coastal area, where weather conditions were favorable, until August. In all other areas of South Vietnam major Communist military initiatives stopped by the end of June when heavy rains made tactical and logistic movement (except minor movement on waterways) difficult. In the B-3 Front, the offensive ground to a halt in June. In MR-3, most Communist ground assaults also had stopped by mid-June. In MR-4, although no major offensive ever got underway, stepped-up fighting occurred for the most part before rains inundated the area after June. In general, in Laos and Cambodia the wet summer months occasioned lighter levels of Communist tactical and logistic activity.

5. The Communists in South Vietnam enter the coming wet summer months in probably their strongest firepower position of the war as a result of the deployment south of significant numbers of armor and heavy artillery since October 1972. Rains and waterlogged roads, however, would constrain mobile use of the armor and towed artillery in MRs 2, 3, and 4, although the T-63 amphibian--an improved Chinese version of the Soviet PT-76--could be utilized effectively in some areas there (during the offensive last year, for example, the Communists successfully used amphibians to cross marshy approaches to the My Chanh River in MR-1). On the other hand, the North Vietnamese could make extensive use of this equipment in MR-1 and coastal MR-2 throughout the summer should they opt for offensive activity there.

6. In the areas affected by the Southwest Monsoon, the summer wet months will impact on both the NVA and ARVN, although ARVN has control of better roads over which to move supplies than do the Communists. (Poor weather would also retard VNAF air support.) The rains probably would limit the duration of major NVA offensive activity in central and southern South Vietnam. In eastern MRS 1 and 2, however, the summer months will offer few weather problems for any offensive options the Communists might elect.

C-3

25X1

25X1

Top Secret



Top Secret